

BOOK REVIEWS



“Ubi et est habitatio sororum et mansio fratrum”: Doppelklöster und ähnliche Klostergemeinschaften im mittelalterlichen Österreich (Diözese Passau in den Ausdehnungen des 13. Jahrhunderts), by Christiane Ulrike Kurz. Kiel: Solivagus Verlag, 2015. Pp. 298; 48 ill. ISBN: 9783943025194.

In recent years, numerous scholars, among them Sherri Franks Johnson, Franz Josef Felten, and Christine Kleinjung, have drawn attention to the potential for flexibility in the form taken by religious communities and lability in the vocabulary applied to them. This represents a shift away from the still-influential work of Herbert Grundmann on medieval religious movements and from historiographical tendencies to focus on single orders. Christiana Ulrike Kurz’s survey of mixed-gender religious houses in the long thirteenth century provides further evidence of variation in forms of observance among religious orders and over time within single communities. Her painstaking work compiling primary sources—both edited and unedited—has in multiple cases illuminated hitherto neglected histories of religious women.

Kurz’s bibliography does not reflect the rich recent work on this complex subject, however. Grundmann is included; Felten and Kleinjung are not. Its thirty pages, almost entirely devoted to German-language titles, represent valuable work in uniting small-scale studies and taking advantage of the work of antiquarians. Kaspar Elm and Michel Parisse’s anthology on mixed-gender religious communities is one of the few titles offering a synthesizing theoretical framework. Omitting recent work on women’s religious communities seems a lost opportunity. A modification to the apparatus, adding a chronology of episcopal interventions or of the first evidence for the existence of the communities surveyed, would have been a valuable addition.

One of the strengths of the book is its use of diverse types of source. Kurz makes extensive use of archaeological material, although baroque modifications to monastic complexes render this challenging, as she acknowledges. Kurz points out as a benefit that the arrangements for the women in *Doppelklöster* are often

described in detail; the implication that, at least in the diocese of Passau, the layout of the men's living arrangements was viewed as the default is an intriguing one. The presence of diverse workshops and gardens suggests that economic cooperation was the norm for vowed men and women in mixed-gender communities. The artistic sources are beautifully reproduced, and Kurz's art historical training is evident in her attentive treatment of them.

The extent of Kurz's treatment of individual houses varies widely, in proportion with the quantities of surviving textual sources. Still, she gives an introductory *précis* on the place of women and mixed-gender houses for each of the seven orders under consideration: Augustinian, Premonstratensian, Holy Ghost, Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan/Clarissan, and Cistercian. These provide valuable perspective, both historic and historiographic. Augustinian houses account for almost half the length of the catalogue that makes up the bulk of the book, and the house of Klosterneuburg alone for a quarter of it. Kurz addresses the difficulties of evaluating the vocabulary for religious women directly in her evaluation of the Augustinian houses of Suben and Waldhausen. Elsewhere, however, peculiarities are not remarked on, as in the case of Klosterneuburg. The women are *canonicarum* in the 1253 papal letter, but *moniales* in a 1307 episcopal letter. Both of these documents are mentioned on multiple occasions, but not reproduced, which is surprising given the format of the monograph. I would have appreciated seeing the vocabulary for religious women displayed visually in the apparatus, not least because the meaning of terms such as *inclusae* could vary situationally, as Letha Böhringer and others have shown.

In the not infrequent instances of labile or uncertain association of men and women within religious communities, Kurz has done painstaking work in seeking out available sources. This is particularly notable for Benedictine houses, where the late medieval cooperation of men and women was rare and has been more rarely still acknowledged in scholarship. In the case of Melk, for instance, she notes that an early modern image shows a space for women's enclosure within the monastery complex, despite the absence of late medieval textual evidence for such a community. A devotional manuscript from Seitenstetten, showing male and female religious in positions of parallel importance, provides one of the few pieces of evidence for cooperation in that community. For Dominican houses in Vienna, and the Cistercian nunnery of Heiligenkreuz in the same city, Kurz demonstrates that the existence of mixed-gender communities is a chimera created by historiographical carelessness.

As Kurz notes in her introduction, particular problems attend attempts to research and reconstruct mixed-gender forms of the religious life. No single

term for mixed-gender religious houses existed in medieval law or custom. Kurz addresses the fraught history of the term *Doppelkloster*, as well as institutions covered by it. The parameters she herself sets for such houses are thought provoking and raise a number of interesting questions. She defines “true double houses” (*echte Doppelklöster*) as following the same rule, while with separate living quarters for the male and female religious. I would have appreciated seeing more of Kurz’s analysis of what sharing the religious life entailed for the communities under consideration. In several cases, she demonstrates that supposed mixed-gender communities are in fact historiographical chimeras.

Kurz might be too ready to take sources at face value in describing conflict as internal rather than a rhetorical fiction of external authorities, as in the case of the Dominican house of Tulln, or the Augustinian house of Ranshofen. In the latter case, the bestowal of archiepiscopal statutes on the women’s community in 1296 is assumed to be a refounding of a house that had disintegrated, rather than an attempt at centralizing control over observance. This is especially remarkable in view of the statutes’ vocabulary, typical of reform movements. The Latin phrase *de novo* is frequently enough used concerning renovation—architectural or spiritual—that I think it is desirable to at least address this alternate possibility. Kurz does not quote sources *in extenso*, which somewhat hampers the reader’s ability to evaluate her interpretations. Several intriguing phenomena, moreover, are left unexamined for possible patterns. The work of Elizabeth Makowski and Heidi Febert would have been valuable in evaluating the impact of changes in law on mixed-gender communities. Hospitals and care for the sick are mentioned in connection with the houses of multiple orders, but not analyzed. Kurz’s work is most valuable where it unites scattered and fragmentary sources to illuminate the history of small houses. This she does for each of the orders evaluated. Kurz describes her methods as especially useful to researchers undertaking projects focusing on single houses, but her rich results should also inspire more comparative research and analysis. As a whole, the monograph both provides valuable groundwork for further study, and illustrates how much is still unknown—or taken for granted—about the histories of late medieval religious women.

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